

Palm Sunday A - From Hosanna to the Son of David to Crucify Him, Crucify Him

April 2, 2023.

Our liturgy this Sunday begins with a celebration of the entry of the Lord into the Holy City and then rapidly focuses in on the Crucifixion of the Lord. What a contrast! We go from Jerusalem where the crowds were celebrating Jesus, crowding him, singing hosanna, to Golgotha, where Jesus was mostly deserted by all as he died on the cross. There are contradictions even deeper than that. Mankind was disobedient to God. Jesus was obedient. Mankind was immersed in material possessions. Jesus was only concerned about the spiritual. Mankind was selfish, each person only concerned with himself or herself. Jesus was self-less. He sweat blood the night before, but he accepted the role he would play in the drama of the Kingdom. Mankind feared death, clinging to life. Jesus embraced death recognizing it is a passage to eternal life. Mankind had embraced physical life and sacrificed spiritual life. Jesus surrendered his physical life so that we can possess spiritual life.

This Sunday, Palm Sunday (Passion Sunday), churches raise the congregations' participation level. We begin this service reading of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. We proclaim "**Hosanna in the highest.**" Then we take up palm branches and sing and process our way into church playing the role of the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. But Palm Sunday is also known as Passion Sunday, for on this day we recount the story of Jesus' suffering and death. And the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem also took part in the betrayal. The first reading from Isaiah (50:4-7) invites us to learn from the example of the Saviour, the trust we should have in our Father in heaven, whatever trials we face. In the second reading, from the letter to the Philippians (2:6-11), Paul summarizes with majestic brevity the drama of the Paschal Mystery we are about to celebrate: Jesus 'emptied himself', sharing our human condition, even to 'accepting death on a cross'; and then, for our sake, he is 'raised high', one with the Father in the glory of the divine name. Matthew's account of the Lord's passion has the features we have come to associate with this gospel (26:14 - 27:66). Faith in Jesus as the messiah has already been clearly affirmed in the description of his entry into Jerusalem; and the ultimate outcome is clearly anticipated: ***After my resurrection, I shall go before you to Galilee***. But the subtlety with which Matthew's account makes an affirmation of faith in the Saviour seems to indicate that he has his Jewish audience in mind. The refrain of fulfilment - as 'the Son of Man goes to his fate' - echoes through the narrative. The titles attributed to Jesus are few, 'the Christ', 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man'. But they are crucial for converts from a Jewish background.

It would be a mistake, though, to think it was a group of Jews who killed Jesus. The people involved in Christ's death are very much like us. The rejection and the crucifixion continue daily. Each of us has a hand in Jesus' death when we hurt others through gossips, slanders, degradation, humiliation, unjust treatment, exploitation, and the list goes on and on. Many of the characters in the Passion story have the freedom to choose but sadly some of them make the wrong choice. For Judas, he chose to betray Jesus with a kiss because of his greed. Peter chose to deny Jesus three times out of fear for his own safety. Pilate, even with the warning of his wife not to harm Jesus, chose to send him to be crucified under the pressure of the crowd. All these people make their choice to protect themselves and they are not thinking of Jesus. Now think of the other people like the women, including Mary the mother and Mary Magdalen, who chose to follow, accompany and support Jesus all the way to Calvary. The centurion, witnessing what happened after Jesus' death, chose to confess his belief in God's son. Joseph of Arimathea, chose to have the courage to ask for the body of Jesus to provide for his burial place. What do we choose? Many times when we sin, do we see ourselves as Judas who betrays, Peter who denies, Pilate who condemns, the crowd who taunt? The simple truth of the Christian experience is that sin has marred our lives. Very often our bad choices made a mess of our world by leading us to conduct our affairs with self-centred hearts hardened against God. The cross is lifted up as a sign of Christ taking the sins of humanity upon himself in order to soften our hearts, by revealing the depth of his perfect love. Before his Passion, Jesus, in the Garden of Gethesemane, must have thought, "this is the cup my Father gave me, should I not drink it?" Jesus made the choice to go through the ordeal knowing this is the mission he has to do to show the love of

the Father for his people, to give them the chance of redemption to enter into eternal life. The fact that God thought we are worth all that pain and suffering should reduce us to silence. We must never forget that Jesus died on the cross so that we might have new life. We should try in our own simple way to imitate him. What are the choices we make in our lives for the love of others? When we are going through trials and tribulations, may be we should also say, **“This is the cup my Father gave me, should I not drink it?”**

So what is it that we celebrate this Holy Week? Holy, or Passion, Week is the final week of the Lenten season. It begins with Palm Sunday and ends with Easter. While you won't find a command in the Bible to observe Holy Week, you will find gospel accounts of the events that inform our observance of each of these holy days. You may be wondering, if observing Holy Week is not commanded in the Bible, why do Christians around the world intentionally mark these days each year? The primary purpose of Holy Week is to intentionally set aside time to remember the incredible sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the salvation we are all offered through him. It's an opportunity for Christians to do so together, as a community of faith—both locally and around the world. Celebrating Holy Week unites us together. So it is the historical events of a little less than 2,000 years ago, but this is only a small part of our commemoration of Holy Week. What we celebrate this Holy week is our participation in the Paschal Mystery, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The Chrism Mass, which normally celebrates in the afternoon of the Holy Thursday is moved to the evening of Holy Tuesday in our Diocese. It is concelebrated by the Bishop and the Priests from all parts of the Diocese. It is a sign of unity and communion between the Priests and their Bishop. But it is also a celebration that fosters the relationship between the Bishop and all members of his diocese: the Lay Faithful, along with the Priests, the Deacons and the Religious. It is the celebration of the Risen Lord's power of life active in the Church. During this Mass, the priests will renew their commitment of service and ministry to the people of God in our Diocese. Then the Holy Oils used in the Sacramental life of the Church will be blessed: -The Oil of the Sick: to strengthen, heal and console the sick and the dying. -The Oil of the Catechumen: used in baptism. -The consecration of the Holy Chrism: used in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, and in the dedication and consecration of churches and altars. On Holy Thursday we join the disciples at the Last Supper and the Garden of Olives. The symbolic washing of feet reminds us that the mandate to serve is fundamental to our being people of the Eucharist. On Good Friday, we call up the courage to stand at the foot of the cross, reminding us that whatever cross we are carrying, Jesus carries it with us and we ask our Saviour to allow us to join our lives to his death. At the Solemn Easter Vigil, which is the climax of the Holy Week (next Sunday), we remember the promises of the Hebrew Scriptures and rejoice at the fulfillment of the prophecies of salvation. At all the Masses of Easter we reaffirm our Baptismal vows and recommit our lives to living for the Kingdom of God. We pray and hope that we are not just going through the motions of the Holy Week year after year. Instead we should be determined to draw closer to God with a deepened faith and love for the God who wants us to know him, love him, serve him and build a better relationship with him that is far beyond our understanding.

Brothers and Sisters, the dominion Jesus came to establish will put past, present and future in right relationship with God. Furthermore, the struggle within Jesus to accept his gruesome fate, and to do so completely abandoned by his friends, emphasizes the nobility and totality of his obedience, the virtue par excellence of God's suffering servant. How is Jesus' example teaching us about our obedience to God? We should surrender our will to God's will. Our mission from God should be our top priority in life. Matthew's gospel have us see in Jesus the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies and promises, so that we could proclaim with the centurion - **“Clearly, this is the Son of God!”** Come and pray with us this week. Our journey through Holy Week together will encourage thoughtful contemplation on Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice, help us eagerly anticipate our resurrection celebration on Easter, and cause us to earnestly reflect on what these events mean for how we live as followers of Jesus Christ today, and together we'll join Christians around the world in reflecting on and

giving thanks for God's great work of salvation and victory over death through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.